

*Talk at Tibet House, New Delhi*

*July 6, 2008*



## **The Dalai Lama's Third Commitment Tibet and its just Cause**

### **The Tragedy of Tibet**

In March 1959, the Dalai Lama left Lhasa, the Tibetan capital to seek refuge in India. Before he reached Tezpur in Assam, very few had approached him or even heard of him. For the public and the media he was just a 'God-king'.

But let us go back a few years in history.

On January 1, 1950 just three months after taking over China, the communist regime in Beijing broadcasted an ominous communiqué:

*"The task for the People's Liberation Army for 1950 is to liberate Taiwan, Hainan and Tibet."*

Nobody knew what this 'liberation' meant.

On October 7, 1950, Chinese troops crossed the Upper Yangtze and began their 'liberation' of Kham. Ten days later, the capital of the province fell with little resistance from the Tibetan troops and the immediate surrender of Ngabo Nwagang Jigme, the Tibetan Governor of the province.

It would take more than two weeks for the information to filter out. Till October 24/25<sup>th</sup> — nearly two weeks after this momentous event had begun unfolding — the Tibetan government knew nothing, the Indian government had heard nothing, and the Chinese were keeping quiet. Other governments, depending on India for news, were not 'informed' either.

All communications (wireless, postal or others) in and out of Tibet were the monopoly of Government of India. The only information trickling out through the Himalayan barrier was what that the Government of Tibet and New Delhi agreed to share with the rest of the world. As Delhi did not know how to react to the invasion, nothing was disclosed to the press. Finally on October 25, the Chinese themselves announced that Tibet was 'liberated.' A brief communiqué of the New China News Agency (*Xinhua*) said: *"People's army units have been ordered to advance into Tibet to free three million Tibetans."* To quote *Xinhua News Agency*: *"Radio Peking has declared that the conquest of Tibet was a 'glorious task' which would put the final seal on the unification of communist China."*

Tibet was so enigmatic and unknown that on 28 October 1950 the French Newspaper *Le Parisien Libéré* wrote on the front-page *Tibet, the most mysterious country in the world led by a child king (Le pays le plus mystérieux du monde gouverné par un dieu enfant)*.

Hardly three weeks later in Lhasa, in the midst of preparations for the proposed debate on the Tibetan issue in the UN, the Gods spoke through the Nechung State Oracle in Lhasa: "Make him King". Thus Tenzin Gyatso was enthroned as the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet at the young age of fifteen. The mysterious 'child king', the 'god king' had become the temporal and religious leader of Tibet.

During the following 8 years, the young monk, surrounded by the traditional regalia tried his best to be a go-between his people and the Chinese Communist cadres.

### **Early 1950's: the first dilemma, his first political choice**

Today the Dalai Lama says that his third commitment in life is the Tibetan issue "as a Tibetan and [I] carry the name of the Dalai Lama. Tibetans place their trust in him. [I] have a responsibility to act as the free spokesperson of the Tibetans in their struggle for justice. As far as this third commitment is concerned, it will cease to exist once a mutually beneficial solution is reached between the Tibetans and Chinese."

In the early 50's, there was no question of 'beneficial' solutions for Communist China and Tibet. The fate of the Roof of the World had just begun to unfold. But the Dalai Lama had the responsibility of a nation on his young shoulders.

In early 1951, the Dalai Lama's entourage decided to leave Lhasa and take refuge in Dromo, near the Indian border. A few months later a 17-Point Agreement was forced on some Tibetan delegates led by Ngabo who, after his arrest, had been rehabilitated to participate in the 'talks'. The Dalai Lama later said that the Agreement was signed under duress. The young monk was in a dilemma, should he return to the Tibetan capital or take refuge abroad. The US State Department had sent a message to his Cabinet: "US would be willing grant asylum Dalai Lama and approximately 100 followers including members families. Dalai Lama would be received as eminent religious dignitary and head autonomous state of Tibet. US unable promise pay expense but would be willing consider what assistance might be given. If Tibetans should come US, it would be advisable they live in modest

and dignified fashion. US will do utmost help Tibetans solve financial problem.”

He had also been informed that a Chinese general would soon be reaching Dromo. He recounted later: “As I pondered these thoughts, I continuously came up against two particular considerations. Firstly it was obvious to me that the most likely result of a pact with America or anyone else was war. And war meant bloodshed” The second consideration was that the United States was a far away country while China would remain Tibet’s neighbour. We shall see how wise the latter consideration was.

Keeping in mind the interest of his people and the Buddhist precept of Ahimsa, he decided to wait for the general and then to return to Lhasa. The Dalai Lama was just 16 years old. This is a recurring character trait in the Tibetan leader: to always choose the solution which would create ‘less bloodshed’ to harm less other human beings. The principle has dictated all his political choices since then.

Interestingly, he met the general. Later, he wrote: “During our meeting it became clear that this man, although supposedly my enemy was in fact just another human being, an ordinary person like myself. This realization had a lasting impact on me.”

Even today, whenever he meets a President, a beggar, a professor, another Buddhist follower or a Chinese, he first sees a man.

### **A first example of conciliation**

On his return to Lhasa, the young Dalai Lama continued his apprenticeship. The Chinese were quick to show their true face; the presence of their army soon increased the tensions on the Roof of the World. The Tibetans realized the inconvenience of being ‘liberated’.The Chinese military command requisitioned food supplies for its troops

and land for its army camps. For centuries, Tibet had practised sustainable development and had been self-sufficient in food. Starvation was unheard of. For the first time in its history, the arrival of the PLA produced a breakdown of the Tibetan economy and it soon became difficult for the Tibetan (and the Chinese) Government to deal with the problem.

For a few months, Lukhangwa, the courageous Tibetan Prime Minister attempted to raise the matter with the Chinese authorities several times; he argued that it was unfair to put such a burden on the Tibetan poor and that it was not necessary to keep so many troops around Lhasa. He even tried to point out that the actions of the Chinese military command were against the 17-Point Agreement. One day, after the Prime Minister had sent a petition to the Chinese General Zhang; the latter became so furious that he requested the Dalai Lama to immediately remove Lukhangwa from Office since he "was obstructing our welfare program".

Chang told the Dalai Lama that the Tibetans had signed an agreement which mentioned that *"Chinese forces should be stationed in Tibet"* and he added that the Tibetan Government was *"therefore obliged to provide them [the Chinese] with accommodation and supplies"*. He added that the Chinese *"...had only come to help Tibet ... to protect her against imperialist domination and that they would go back to China.... when you can stand on your feet, we will not stay here even if you ask us to."*<sup>1</sup>

The Dalai Lama had no alternative but to dismiss Lukhangwa: "...to oppose and anger the Chinese authorities could only lead us further along the vicious circle of repression and popular resentment...Our

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<sup>1</sup> The Dalai Lama, *My Land and my People*, (New York: Potala Corporation, 1977), p. 92.

only hope was to persuade the Chinese peaceably to fulfil the promises they had made in their agreement. Non-violence was the only course which might win us back a degree of freedom in the end, perhaps after years of patience. That meant co-operation whenever it was possible and passive resistance whenever it was not.<sup>2</sup>

It was the first breach of the Agreement, which stipulated that the Chinese would maintain the existing political system and the status and powers of the Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lama had chosen the conciliatory path, even if this made him sad: he was aware of his Prime Minister's great qualities and love for his country. During the following decades, he continued to follow the 'conciliatory' path which later became known as the Middle Path.

#### **1954: Listening to others**

The Dalai Lama was 19 years-old when he was invited to visit Beijing to see New China for himself.

The young Lama had the opportunity to discover another world and meet toughened Communist leaders such as Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi or Zhou Enlai. All of them believed that "power came out of the barrel of a gun", they had gone through decades of hardship during the Long March and the wars against the Japanese and their own fellow Nationalists.

Tenzin Gyatso could have remained confined in his role of religious leader and scoff at this bizarre and barbarian ideology which advocated violence and war. But no, he wanted to understand. He had long conversations with Bapa Phuntso Wangyal, the first Tibetan Communist who had led the People Liberation Army into Lhasa 3 years earlier, where the young Communist tried to convince the monk of the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

importance of the 'revolution'. Wangyal recalled: "I told him about how I had become involved in revolutionary activities and what my goals were. I also explained to him about the Communist Party and the reforms that were taking place in inland China. He was extremely interested, asked many questions, and openly agreed that the Tibetan nation was backward and had to be reformed. Without reforms, he said, there was no hope for Tibetans to progress. It was wonderful to get to see and know the real Dalai Lama-the person behind the pomp and ceremony-and from these conversations, my own hopes for the future were bolstered. I really came to believe that under the Dalai Lama's leadership, Tibet would be able to reform and improve with a Tibetan flavor. The Dalai Lama was the unquestioned leader of the Tibetan people, and as such did not need to fight or scheme to keep his high position. He could unilaterally put into practice his good thoughts about Tibet's future."<sup>3</sup>

At a talk given by the Dalai Lama at the IIM in Ahmadabad, the faculty and students of the prestigious management institute were flabbergasted to hear him declare himself a 'Marxist monk'. He must remember the lectures of Wangyal in Beijing.

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<sup>3</sup> The Dalai Lama wrote about Phunwang: "In due course I became good friends with Phuntsog Wangyal. [He] turned out to be a very able man, calm and wise; a good thinker too. He was also very sincere and honest, and I enjoyed his company a great deal. Evidently, he felt very happy in his assignment as my official interpreter, not the least because of the access it gave him to Chairman Mao, whom he idolized. However, his feelings toward me were equally strong. Once when we were talking about Tibet, he said he was full of optimism for the future as he considered that I was very open-minded. He told me how many years ago he had been to a public audience at the Norbulingka and seen a small boy on a throne. "And now you are a small boy no longer, here with me in Peking." At the end of our conversation I felt that we had a high regard for one another. Such differences as we had were personal matters, so there was no basis for conflict. In the final analysis, we were both Tibetans thinking deeply about the future of our country." (The Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p. 86-87).

To come back to those informal discussions in Beijing, the Dalai Lama was curious about everything, wanting to learn from everybody. Wangyal wrote that one day the Tibetan leader was invited to attend a Beijing opera. After the performance, the Dalai Lama kept asking questions, unfortunately Wangyal who knew Marx, Hegel or Stalin by heart, did not know anything about opera.

The Dalai Lama demonstrated this quality very young, always ready to listen to others and get their point of view, though at the end, he would always decide himself what the right path for Tibet was. He has often been accused of being influenced by close collaborators, but it is an incorrect statement, during his soon-sixty years of political life, he has always decided himself what was the best for Tibet, including handing over his power to a democratic set-up in exile and renouncing the independence of his country in 1988.

In March 1955, as he was leaving China, Mao visited him a last time in his guest house. The Great Helmsman asked him about his impressions of China. The Dalai Lama told him that he understood the need for Tibet to reform and was committed to it.

Then Mao told him: "Religion is poison." The Dalai Lama recalled "At this I felt a violent burning sensation all over my face and I was suddenly very afraid. "So," I thought, "you are the destroyer of the Dharma after all." ...I hoped he would not sense the horror I felt: it might have broken his trust in me."<sup>4</sup>

It is not because he was always ready to learn from others that he was ready to accept other's opinions or beliefs. In this case, he strongly rejected Mao's assertions.

Because the Dalai Lama is first and foremost a Buddhist monk, he is a realist. Two thousand five hundred years ago, the one the Tibetan

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<sup>4</sup> Dalai Lama, *The, Freedom in Exile* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p.99.



leader often refers to as 'my boss', Gautama Buddha told his disciples: 'As the wise test gold by burning, cutting and rubbing it on a piece of touchstone, so are you to accept my words only after examining them and not merely out of regard for me.'

During his entire political journey the Dalai Lama has remained a follower of the Great Gautama. Ideologies, like gold, have to be examined before being accepted.

He is probably the only religious leader in the world who has dared to declare that if modern sciences prove that the scriptures are wrong, one should believe the scientific facts and not what was written 2000 years ago. If all religious leaders would today preach this principle, more than 90% of the world conflicts would probably disappear.

### **Trip to India in 1956-57: another step in his apprenticeship**

Events continued to unfold during the following years. After his long visit to China in 1954, the Dalai Lama was happy to receive an invitation to visit India at the end of 1956. The celebration of the 2,500<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the Buddha was a good occasion to make a pilgrimage and meet the Indian leaders.

During his several-month stay, the young Tibetan leader (who was accompanied by the Panchen Lama) had many occasions to discuss the Tibetan issue with Nehru.

Like in 1951, the question was raised, should he ask for asylum in India or return to the Land of Snows. Zhou Enlai, anxious that the Dalai Lama might strike a deal with the Indian Prime Minister, was often seen in Delhi during these months.<sup>5</sup> He had several meetings

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<sup>5</sup> Because of the Dalai Lama's visit to India, Zhou Enlai came to India in December 1956, early January and end January 1957. Three official visits in two months, never seen before (or after) in diplomatic annals.

with the Dalai Lama who recalled one in the Chinese embassy in Delhi: *"I was having a frank discussion with [Zhou]. He told me that the situation in Tibet had deteriorated, indicating that the Chinese authorities were ready to use force to crush any popular uprising."*<sup>6</sup>

The Dalai Lama 'bluntly' replied that the Chinese were *"forcing unwanted reforms, despite explicit reassurances that they would do no such thing"*. The Dalai Lama later wrote that the clever Foreign Minister<sup>7</sup> used his charm and promised that the words of Chairman Mao who had announced that *"no reform should be introduced in Tibet for at least the next six years"* would be implemented. Generously, he even added that it could be postponed for 'fifty years, if necessary'. The Dalai Lama was not convinced. When he saw that the interests of his nation and his people were in danger, he could be firm and strong despite his young age.

When the Dalai Lama next met Nehru, the Prime Minister advised him to return to Tibet and work with the Chinese on the basis of the 17-Point Agreement. *"There is no alternative,"* said Nehru, *"India could be of no assistance to Tibet"*.

Many tried to convince him to stay, but he decided to 'give the Chinese one last try'. Lukhagwa, his former Prime Minister criticised him for consulting the oracles: *"When men become desperate they consult the gods. And when the gods become desperate, they tell lies"*. He was not desperate; he just wanted to give the Chinese one more chance. Even today, despite the constant insults and rebuffs from Beijing, he keeps giving them another chance to reach an honourable solution.

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<sup>6</sup> The Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile*, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>7</sup> Zhou Enlai was also Foreign Minister.

The dark clouds were gathering and the storm blew over with an uprising of the entire population of Lhasa in March 1959. The Dalai Lama had to flee Tibet.

Again here it is the State Oracle who ultimately gave him the solution. In his memoirs, he recalls: "I again sought the counsel of the oracle. To my astonishment, he shouted, "Go! Go! Tonight!" The medium, still in his trance, then staggered forward and, snatching up some paper and a pen, *wrote* down, quite clearly and explicitly the route that I should take." The same night he left for India.

### **1959-1973: the First Years in Exile**

During the 14 first years in exile, the Dalai Lama remained in India. If one looks at the list of dignitaries he met during this period, they are mainly Indian (President, Prime Ministers, etc.). The only exception is the King of Thailand, a Buddhist country. His main concern was not humanity as a whole or interreligious dialogue, but the resettlement of his people in the land of the Buddha.

Once I asked him: "Why did you start so late to travel around the world and offer your message". He candidly replied: "I was not very sure. I had the impression that the West was something different, but since the '60s we had the opportunity to meet foreigners here [in Dharamsala], then around 1973, we said "OK: the time has come". I remember when my Air India plane was about to land in Rome in 1973, I realized: 'It looks like India, people look like us, they are not different.' Deep inside, I had the feeling that the West was quite different."

"People are like us". It is probably around this time that he decided to invest his energies beyond the Tibet issue.

The West was waiting for a fresh message which would not exclude anything and anybody. During the same interview, he explained his 3 commitments: "But the Tibet issue is also connected with human values and inter-religious harmony.... In a way it not a voluntary commitment, it is due to past history and to the Dalai Lama institution. I am bound to this commitment and this responsibility, because I am the Dalai Lama who played a role in the past history of Tibet." Once again, it is not that one of the commitments is incompatible or irreconcilable with the two others. In the Dalai Lama's vision, though he has given a hierarchy, all three can be carried out together harmoniously.

### **1973-1979: the First Visits Abroad**

The 1973 tour marked a new phase of his life. The 'simple monk' had managed to rehabilitate most of his countrymen in a decent manner. Many institutions such as a government in exile, an elected Tibetan Parliament with reservations for the 3 regions and 5 religious sects of Tibet, a Medical & Astro Institute, an Institute of Performing Arts, several monasteries (particularly the three great seats of knowledge of Drepung, Ganden and Sera) as well as a number of agricultural settlements had been established in exile. Thanks to his constant efforts, the unique culture of Tibet was saved. The Dalai Lama has mentioned countless times that it was thanks to the constant support of the Government of India that this rehabilitation work could be successful, though politically Delhi had abandoned Tibet.

During that first trip to Europe in 1973, he visited Italy, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, UK, West Germany and Austria.

Though the US Administration had offered him asylum in 1950, 23 years later there was no question of Washington granting him a US visa; he was *persona non grata*. He would visit the US for the first time in 1979 and it is only in 1987 that the Dalai Lama met with a high US official (Jimmy Carter, former US President). During all these years, he was a political pariah. One can see here the wisdom of the young boy who in July 1951 decided to return to Tibet and not to bank on the United States.

In 1973, he had the occasion to meet the Pope in Rome and the Archbishop of Canterbury in London. His second commitment to interreligious dialogue began to take root. During the following years he would have the occasion to meet leaders from all faiths and religions. Paradoxically, the Dalai Lama was banned from the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders organised in New York in August 2000.

The summit was held at the United Nations a week before a similar gathering of world political leaders and brought more than 1,000 religious figures together. Due to Beijing's pressure, the organizers did not invite the Dalai Lama.<sup>8</sup> So goes our beautiful world!

### **1978-1989: The first moves to contact China**

At the beginning of 1978, China was emerging from the nightmarish Cultural Revolution; more progressive leaders such Deng Xiaoping had come to the helm; the Panchen Lama and Bapa Phuntsok Wangyal had

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<sup>8</sup> *The New York Times* wrote on August 7, 2000: "China detests the Dalai Lama because he is a symbol of the distinctive Tibetan culture Beijing has been trying to destroy for the past 41 years. China regularly uses its power as a member of the Security Council to block his participation in U.N.-sponsored events. The Dalai Lama has told the conference organizers that they should go ahead without him. But it would be better to take a stand against his unjustifiable exclusion."

been rehabilitated. The Dalai Lama understood that the time had come to take the first step towards a rapprochement with China.

In his yearly 10 March statement, he made a suggestion: why can't the Chinese authorities allow Tibetans in Tibet to visit their parents and relatives in exile. He added: "Similar opportunities should be given to the Tibetans in exile. Under such an arrangement we can be confident of knowing the true situation inside Tibet".

In December 1978, Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's elder brother was contacted by Li Juisin, director of Xinhua News Agency in Hong Kong: Deng Xiaoping wanted to meet him.

With the knowledge and blessings of his brother, Thondup made a 'private' visit to Beijing in February 1979. Was it a coincidence, but at the same time, the Indian Foreign Minister A.B. Vajpayee was visiting China?

During his encounter with Deng Xiaoping, Thondup was told that Beijing wanted to invite the Tibetan refugees to return to Tibet. Deng explained to the Dalai Lama's brother: "It is better to see once than to hear a hundred times".

The new leader of China more importantly stated: "The door is opened for negotiations as long as we don't speak about independence. Everything else is negotiable."

It is on this basis that three fact-finding delegations visited Tibet in 1979-80 and subsequently talks were held in 1982 and 1984 between Dalai Lama's Representatives and some Chinese officials in Beijing. During the 1982 and 1984 'talks', the Tibetan and Chinese negotiators were on opposite wavelengths. The envoys from Dharamsala thought in terms of 'self-determination', while for Beijing independence was not negotiable. Further, the Chinese leadership was ready to discuss only the status of the Dalai Lama in case he would like to return to China

(not Tibet) while the Tibetans' concern was the fate of 6 million Tibetans.

Though the Tibetans in exile and their supporters were not conscious of it till the Dalai Lama's speech in Strasbourg in June 1988, the renouncement of independence (or self-determination) was contained in Deng Xiaoping's 1979 statement. Whether one agrees or not with its content, the Strasbourg Proposal is the logical conclusion of Thondups' first contacts.

In an interview, Lodi Gyari, the Special Envoy explained the Dalai Lama's approach: "I remember very vividly that in 1987, when His Holiness first presented the 'Middle Way approach' in a formal document, he consulted a few people outside of the Tibetan leadership.

One of them was former (US) President (*Jimmy*) Carter. His Holiness has a lot of respect for President Carter, not because he had been the US president, but because His Holiness believes he is very wise and religious minded (in fact he became closer to us after he left the White House). So I flew directly from New Delhi to New York to Minneapolis, where President Carter was staying at that time, to show him an 8-page document, which later became the 'Strasbourg Proposal'.

He really took time to read it through (he is famous for that) and took nearly one hour to study it very carefully. Then he turned to me and asked: "What is His Holiness' bottom line?" I told him: "This is the bottom line." He was surprised: "If this is the bottom line, you have to start from somewhere else."

I responded to President Carter saying this issue was raised, but His Holiness' position is that he is not a politician and that he was a simple monk who wants to be really sincere and transparent and place on the table what he really wants."

Through this explanation one can see how the Dalai Lama functions. The proposal well was received by the Western governments, but a period of unrest had already started in Tibet which culminated with the declaration of Martial Law on March 8, 1989. Thereafter, there was no question of negotiations anymore.

During these 10 years, despite the compromises made by the Dalai Lama, his attempt to find a negotiated solution to the Tibetan predicament, led nowhere. One could even say that a solution seems to be less attainable.

### **1989, a New Phase: Nobel Peace Prize & Universal responsibility**

On December 1989, while his country was still under Martial Law, the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Though he accepted the Prize "on behalf of the six million Tibetan people, my brave countrymen and women inside Tibet, who have suffered and continue to suffer so much", this momentous event brought about a new direction in his life.

In his Nobel Speech, he made clear that humanity was now central to his preoccupations: "No matter what part of the world we come from, we are all basically the same human beings. We all seek happiness and try to avoid suffering. We have the same basic human needs and concerns. All of us human beings want freedom and the right to determine our own destiny as individuals and as peoples. That is human nature."



Though he reaffirmed that “with truth, courage and determination as our weapons, Tibet will be liberated,” what he terms today as his first commitment appears for the first time in the foreground.<sup>9</sup>

During the next few years, his concept of ‘universal responsibility’ developed and became the core of his political thought, angering many young Tibetans who felt that his role as the Dalai Lama was first to help the people of Tibet in this difficult period of their history.

This misunderstanding still persists today, though for him there is no incompatibility between his different commitments.

From the early 90’s till today, wherever he went, he lectured about ethics as the only way to save the planet from self-destruction. This applied to the fields of environment, business<sup>10</sup>, administration or education; in fact in all fields of life. For him, ethics or human values mean that humanity should be at the centre of our thoughts.

Interestingly, his focus on ‘humanity’ has introduced millions all over the world to the case of Tibet and the totalitarian attitude of the Chinese government vis-à-vis the Dalai Lama. This shows the interrelatedness of the three commitments. Today the Dalai Lama is the most popular ‘moral’ figure of the planet and this fact has indirectly been a great booster for the Tibetan cause.

## **Democracy**

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<sup>9</sup> His first commitment is to promote “human values such as compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, contentment and self-discipline. All human beings are the same. We all want happiness and do not want suffering. Even people who do not believe in religion recognize the importance of these human values in making their life happier.” The Dalai Lama calls these human values, secular ethics: “He remains committed to talk about the importance of these human values and share them with everyone he meets.”

<sup>10</sup> In January, 2008, he told the IIM’s student that he is still ‘a Marxist monk’.

Before concluding, one important point should be made. One of the reasons why Tibet is not the Dalai Lama's first commitment is not that he today cares less for Tibet than humanity or interreligious dialogue. However, he knows that he is not immortal and one day he will be no more; he would therefore like the people of Tibet to assume their own responsibilities and future.

This is not something new; in 1963, the Dalai Lama presented a draft democratic constitution for Tibet. A 'Charter of Tibetans in Exile', a sort of democratic constitution for the exiled population was later promulgated. In this charter was enshrined freedom of speech, belief, assembly and movement.

In 1992, the Dalai Lama issued some guidelines for a constitution of future Tibet. It was announced that if Tibet became 'free', his immediate task would be to set up an interim government whose first responsibility would be to elect a constitutional assembly to frame and adopt Tibet's democratic constitution.

The Dalai Lama would then transfer his historical authority to an Interim President and live as an ordinary citizen.

Two years back, he explained to me: "Tibetans inside and outside Tibet put their total trust in me. They put their hopes into me; that is why I have the moral responsibility to serve them as much as I can. In the meantime, the Tibetan cause is the cause of a nation, this struggle should continue from generation to generation. My life represent only one generation. It is therefore very important, for the people themselves to take more responsibilities."

Introducing democracy amongst the Tibetan refugees has not been an easy task. The Tibetans have being the most recalcitrant democrats, their reasoning being, "the Dalai Lama is wiser than us, the people, it is therefore logical that he should guide us and take all the decisions."

The Dalai Lama asserts: "I am deliberately promoting democracy. I truly believe in this concept. For the past 46 years, I am fully committed to the democratization of the Tibetan society. My biggest achievement is to have now an elected leader, the Kalon Tripa [Prime Minister]. Since the last elections (6 years ago), I consider my position as of semi-retirement. If we return to Tibet with a certain degree of freedom, then I will fully resign. Therefore, my third commitment has some limitation. But even in my complete retirement, I will continue with the promotion of human values and promotion of religious harmony."

This is one more example of the interrelatedness of the three commitments and the Dalai Lama's political action.

### **Buddhist qualities: not to convert**

If one takes a panoramic view of the 58 years of public life of the Dalai Lama, a thread appears. He has always acted as a Buddhist monk and a Bodhisattva. In fact, his two first commitments spring from his bodhisattvahood.

Why is the Dalai Lama such an exceptional being?

A couple of years ago, I asked the Dalai Lama if one of his aims was to propagate Buddhism. I mentioned the fact that in the early 1960, he had sent several Tibetan Lamas to the West to teach. He categorically replied: "It has never been my interest to propagate Buddhism, my own religion. At that time, the main reason why we were eager to send Tibetans scholars to some European universities (in France, Germany, Denmark or Italy) was some wrong perceptions about Tibetan Buddhism. It was our duty to show a proper representation of Tibetan Buddhism. This was the main reason."

Since then, Tibetan Buddhism has spread like wildfire, but the Dalai Lama remains adamant not to convert anybody: "Even today, I have no intention to expand or promote Tibetan Buddhism. Of course, like in France there were Vietnamese who were traditionally Buddhist, [in such a case] we could naturally help to promote a better knowledge of Buddhism. We were happy to do this. [To Westerners] I always make it clear that it is better to keep your own religion. Out of millions of people, some may have different predispositions: they find Indian or eastern traditions (including Tibetan Buddhism) more attractive, more effective. These people who genuinely show interest in Tibetan Buddhism, it is our duty to help them. It is not a conversion."

He continued to follow a similar approach in the years and decades to come. The paradox is that while the 'spiritual' wave swept the West, it did not translate into political support for Tibet. Asked to explain this dichotomy (on one side, the public is open to his message, but on the other side, governments are not supportive), he answered: "My message is for individuals, not for politicians. My message is not to influence policies. I do not say, "The government should do this or that". I never try to influence policies or suggest change in policies." Just as he does not try to convert other people to his own religion, he does not want to 'convert' politicians to his cause, though he remains open to receive their voluntary support.

He is respected the world over for not trying to 'force' the Tibetan issue on any country, or leader who often have their own compulsions; in due time, this immense respect garnered over the years will certainly help the Tibetan cause. Is he not an example how other political leaders should behave?

Another trait I find remarkable is that he is the only politician in the world who dares to say: "I don't know".

He once explained: "I have this habit to respond to questions: 'I don't know'. I still remember very clearly in 1973: it was after a talk at a reception in London. One old English gentleman came to me. He expressed his surprise to my response: 'I don't know'. He admired me for having been able to say 'I don't know'. For me (and for Tibetans in general), it is something normal to say this. Sometimes also it is out of humility, even though we know, we will still say: 'I don't know'.

Amongst Tibetans it is rare to find someone who says: 'I know best'. I carried this attitude, it was more of a habit for me, but in their eyes, it was very unusual that someone who is the Dalai Lama and is considered by many people as a religious leader, this person could say: 'I don't know'. This created first a bit of surprise. The reason for which I had no fear is that I considered these people as other human beings. I did not consider them as strangers. Similarly, I was for them only other human being. I could immediately get along with them." All this makes the Dalai Lama an exceptional being.

## **Conclusion**

The fact that he has added two more commitments along the road (though they were engrained in his character since his childhood and probably from past lives), has not hampered in any way his deep commitment for Tibet; on the contrary, it has given a larger dimension and respectability to the Tibetan cause.

To conclude, I would like to quote from the Dalai Lama about the importance of Tibet for the future of humankind: "Tibetan culture with its unique heritage - born of the effort of many human beings of good spirit, of its contacts with Chinese, Indian, Nepalese and Persian culture, and due to its natural environment - has developed some kind of energy which is useful, very helpful, towards cultivating peace of

mind and a joyful life. I feel that there is a potential for Tibet to help humanity, and particularly our Eastern neighbour, where millions of young Chinese have lost their spiritual values. I feel very strongly that Tibetan culture will have a future role to play in humanity."

It is one of the most inconvenient questions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, why has Tibet been deleted from politicians' memory?